



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

African Elephant Conservation Fund

The African elephant is a threatened species—of that there is no doubt—but the level and kinds of threat to its populations vary significantly from one area to another. While some areas in southern Africa have stable or increasing populations, east Africa has lost up to 65 percent of its elephants, mostly as a result of the international ivory trade. In central Africa, hunting elephants for “bushmeat” may be a greater threat than ivory poaching. The proliferation of weapons and displacement of large numbers of people contribute to this rapidly increasing threat. The economic plight of many African nations undermines the ability of range countries to support their national parks and protected areas.

Development and human population growth also impact the future of elephants and other wildlife in Africa. As rural populations grow, the need for new

agricultural lands and water also grows. This often results in competition between humans and elephants for common resources. Human-elephant conflict invariably results.

As more pressure is put on the environment and elephant populations, the greater the need for effective protection and management. It is important to know and understand how many elephants there are, where and why they move the long distances they do, and the threats they face. In the short term, protection of threatened elephant populations is of utmost importance. In the longer term, effective land-use planning and protected area management, conservation education, and sound international policy are crucial. Perhaps of even greater importance are the needs of local people, who live alongside elephants. It is these individuals and communities who must



Savanna elephant

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cope daily with the threats to life and property posed by roving elephants. Until human-elephant conflict is minimized the species' survival will remain at risk. Meeting the complex challenge of elephant conservation in the new millennium demands a multi-faceted approach.

Congress enacted the African Elephant Conservation Act (Act) in 1988. The Act established the African Elephant Conservation Fund (Fund) as the mechanism through which the United States provides financial assistance to support protection, conservation, and management of African elephants. Through the Fund, and in cooperation with governments of elephant range states as well as non-governmental organizations and local individuals, the United States seeks to play an important role in helping this magnificent species not only survive but receive more effective management. Congress appropriated \$2,994,000 from 1998-2000. During this period, the Fund has supported 51 projects in 18 countries, leveraging \$6,454,604 in matching and in-kind support.

The following projects provide a sample of contributions made by the Fund for the continued survival of African elephants.

A partnership between the Fund, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the government of the Republic of Congo facilitates applied research on one of Africa's most important elephant populations. The work provides essential information on the movements of forest elephants in and around the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park and its buffer zone. The project employs GPS-collars, overflights, and extensive groundwork to relate observed patterns to ecological factors and human influences such as poaching, logging, and agricultural settlements. Local partners use light aircraft to facilitate the location of collared elephants and to upload data stored on the collars. Overflights also produce data-rich video on areas found to be important to elephants. There is an extensive training component to enhance the ability of Congolese conservationists and park personnel to manage elephants. The information gained in this study will increase the Government of Congo's capacity to conserve elephants and their

habitats in this important area of Central Africa.

One of the greatest impediments to conserving elephants in West Africa is the lack of trained field personnel. To address this problem, the Fund, with Conservation International and two host countries, helps conserve and manage populations of African forest elephants in Kakum National Park (Ghana) and Marahoue National Park (Côte d'Ivoire). Advanced training was provided for field personnel in survey techniques, population estimation, habitat analysis, and other essential management skills. In addition, field work by researchers in Kakum NP tested and compared two methodologies used to estimate forest elephant numbers—the conventional dung count methods and an innovative technique using genetic analysis. The resulting information on elephant numbers and movements will be used to determine the relationship between elephant habitat use within the parks and human land use in surrounding areas.

The Fund collaborated with the University of California and its associates in the field to conduct applied genetic research on non-invasive genotyping of African elephants based on dung samples. This technique is believed to be 100 times more informative than previously applied methods. It will enable researchers to refine methodologies and develop new applications for population census and genetic profiling. Population genetics information will provide wildlife managers with baseline data for monitoring genetic erosion and inbreeding, and help plan translocations when necessary.

In a project supported by the Fund, in partnership with the African Wildlife Foundation and host country organizations, conservationists, conducted applied research and community conservation activities to conserve and manage African elephant populations in the area around Amboseli National Park, Kenya. The project provided detail information on seasonal movements and distribution of elephants, particularly in relation to human settlements. Local partners are attempting to resolve elephant-human conflicts in the greater Amboseli

Ecosystem. The team is implementing outreach programs with local Maasai communities in combination with GPS tracking of collared elephants and periodic aerial surveys.

Elephants pose enormous problems to subsistence farmers in many places. A project was assisted by the Fund to study and manage human-elephant conflict in the Muzarabani Rural District, Zimbabwe. Communities in this area have agricultural holdings subject to depredations by resident and migrant elephant herds. The Fund supported research on the movements, behavior, and habitat use of crop-raiding elephants, with the goal of developing effective prevention and deterrent strategies. Local partners are also experimenting with their recently developed elephant deterrent, which contains a harmless product made of an extract of locally grown peppers.

Significant improvement in the conservation status of African elephants is now evident in some places where the Fund has worked with on-the-ground partners. However, many areas still suffer from the conditions evident to Congress during the formulation of the landmark legislation that created the Fund. The Fund stands ready to continue its important role in the conservation of the African elephant.

The Service invites submission of grant proposals for the conservation of the African elephant throughout its range and supports projects which develop local ability to manage, conserve, research, or protect this species through provision of training and equipment.

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